



BULLETIN

ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION FOR MULTILINGUAL MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Mixed Age Groups: Advantages For Young Language Minority Students

by Luisiana Melendez Rojas, Streamwood Elementary School, School District U-46, Elgin

Abstract

The practice of grouping students in non-graded, multi-age classrooms presents multiple advantages over traditional education. It permits children to progress while having access to more advanced peers who serve as supporters, guides and models of academic success. Multi-age classrooms are particularly appropriate for the learning and developmental needs of preschool and early primary children.

Multi-age classrooms are more likely to use a variety of teaching strategies and methods facilitating the exposure of children of diverse backgrounds to interactive, experiential methods conducive to a more effective education. Language minority children are often considered to be at risk of academic

difficulties due in part to the divergence between the home and school cultures. In mixed-age classrooms older, more experienced students can provide younger ones with models for successful adaptation to the demands posed by the explicit and implicit school curricula.

Implementation of this methodology demands considerable investment in teacher training and administrative support. Nevertheless, it is to be considered a worthwhile effort that can support the successful adaptation of linguistically diverse children to the school culture.

Introduction

The term mixed-age, multi-age, non-graded and multigrade are often used to describe the practice of teaching children of different ages and ability levels together in the same classroom.

Please see *Mixed Age Groups* on page 8

The Results Are In!

New IAMME Executive Board to Start Term June 1, 1996

Congratulations to the following IAMME members who were elected to serve on the 1996 - 1998 Executive Board. They are **Valerie Brown**, Chicago; **Michelle Ponce de Leon Conlon**, Carpentersville; **Leticia Gonzalez**, Chicago; **Waunita Kinoshita**, Urbana; **Jim Somday**, Chicago; **Ezequiel Vargas**, Rockford; and **Josie Yanguas**, Illinois Resource Center. Maria Cristina Marchica from Palatine was also re-elected. Unfortunately Cristina will be moving to Arizona this summer, and she will not be able to serve on the Board. **Sunny Abello** will serve as President of this new Board while **Joe Negrón** as Past President will be an ex-officio member. All the other officers of the Board will be determined during the first organizational meeting of this group.

A large debt of thanks is extended to our outgoing Board members including **Barbara Falcone**, **Maria Cristina Marchica**, **Mary Trieschmann**, and **Rene Valenciano**. IAMME will always be indebted to all of their hard work and effort.

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Calendar of Events

IAMME Meetings

Please call Josie Yanguas, Secretary for more information and to RSVP at (847) 803-3112.

Future meetings to be announced later.

Upcoming Events and Conferences

Eighth Annual Materials Fair

Lincolnwood, Illinois

October, 1996

For more information, please call the Illinois Resource Center at (847) 803-3112.

Illinois Family Education Institute

Parent Involvement Workshops

Matteson, Illinois

August 21-23, 1996

For more information, please call Monica Mazur at the ALRC, (847) 803-3535.

High Scope

Problem Solving Approach to Conflict

Morraine Valley Community College

Palos Hills, Illinois

July 26-27, 1996

For more information, please call High Scope at (313) 485-2000, ext. 218.

Twenty-Sixth Annual International Bilingual-Bicultural Education Conference of the National Association for Bilingual Education

Albuquerque, New Mexico

February 4-8, 1997

For more information, please call NABE at (202) 898-1829

Twentieth Annual Conference for Teachers of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students

Oak Brook, Illinois

January, 1997

For more information, please call (847) 803-3535

Research Aspects of Educational Assessment

Holiday Inn

Naperville, Illinois

October 4, 1996

For more information, please call IASCD conference office at (847) 619-5927.

Publication Schedule

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Quarter Page (3.75" x 5")	100.00
Eighth Page (3.75" x 2.5")	50.00

For additional information about advertising, contact Shelly Blake at (847) 776-9697 or write to 573 Parkside Drive, Palatine, Illinois 60067-9033.

The ***IAMME Bulletin*** is published quarterly by The Illinois Association for Multilingual Multicultural Education. **IAMME** is a professional association for people who promote high quality educational policies and practices for potentially English proficient learners. It is an organization comprised of people who believe in the benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism. IAMME's motto is *Celebrating Diversity in Illinois*.

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The *Bulletin* is published quarterly for IAMME members and is used as a tool for providing information to its members. IAMME has taken all reasonable steps to confirm the accuracy of any article appearing in the *IAMME Bulletin*. IAMME may not, however, be held responsible for any inaccuracies or omissions of information that may appear in any article. All articles printed in the *IAMME Bulletin* are solely the opinion of the author, and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the Illinois Association for Multilingual Multicultural Education. Readers are welcome to reprint articles from the *IAMME Bulletin*, provided proper credit is given to the author and to *IAMME Bulletin* as the source.

Members and non-members are welcome to submit articles or other items of interest. All submissions must include the submitter's full name and phone number for verification to be considered for inclusion in the *IAMME Bulletin*. Please take notice of the publication dates and deadlines.

IAMME is located at 1855 Mount Prospect Road, Des Plaines, Illinois 60018-1805, Tel. (847) 803-3112. Subscriptions to the *IAMME Bulletin* would include a one year membership with the organization. One year memberships are \$20 for a regular membership or \$60 for a combined NABE/IAMME membership (membership rates as of June 1, 1996).



Editorial by Joe Negrón

A Thank You Note

I remember sitting in class in the first grade, looking out the window into the courtyard of the school. A robin – so I found out later what that particular bird was called – was busy flying back and forth between her tree and the ground. With each trip she brought back a piece of grass or some other small article up to a branch just beyond anyone’s reach. How wonderfully fulfilling that project must have been for her!

In front of the class the teacher was moving back and forth, speaking with cartoon-like animation, as she scribbled strange things on the black surface securely attached to the wall. Thirty minutes earlier, I had made a choice to pay attention to the bird rather than the young lady at the front of the room whose language and mannerisms and excitement seemed so foreign to me. No, not foreign – alien is a better word. Occasionally, I would turn back and smile at her as her strange words were met by a flurry of hands waving back at her; children, just as strange-sounding as she, jumping up and down with their, “Mi, mi, mi!” “Aye no, Aye no!”

And after she would motion to one of them, he would stand up and recite what seemed like a litany to me, no more familiar than the scribbling on the black surface. And as she pointed with the meter stick to those funny little scribbles, the boys and girls would sing-song in unison.

Secure in the last seat in the row by the windows, I went back to observing the court yard and the meticulous house building of the robin. Suddenly a “Crack!” and a stinging, burning sensation went shooting up my arms from my hands! As my hands

reddened, tears flooded my eyes and began their journey down my cheeks, landing on the math book which lay open on my desk. As much as my hands stung, the tears burned hotter. All eyes were on me, and the embarrassment of being punished in front of my classmates hurt deeper than the blow I had just received.

And that was my introduction to the American educational system!

How long ago that now seems. How far I have come since that day when I found out that I was somehow “different” than the other kids around me. If only I had understood what was going on in my class!

Well, hold on a second! Had I understood what was going on in that class that day, I guess I probably never would have grown up bilingual! I may have never become a teacher! I may have never become a bilingual teacher, a bilingual administrator! And I would never have understood the feelings of that new student who is feeling just a little “different” in his new school in a new country where everyone speaks a different language and writes in scribble scrabble!

What if? What if? What if? Would I be stepping down as president of IAMME, making room for a new Executive Board which will take this organization into the twenty first century? Probably not! But then, it did happen, and I am, I am, I am!

Welcome new Executive Board Members! Help me thank my first grade teacher! She taught me more that day than she will ever, ever know.

Letters to the Editor

Bilingualism Helps All Children

The issue of bilingual education is continuously brought to our attention through many different sources... state or federal legislative efforts, letters to the editors of urban and local newspapers, TV editorials for and against, extremists who may demand no bilingual services and many other avenues, as well.

However, bilingual education makes educational sense. Cognitive development must profit from the linguistic and cultural experiences that children bring to the classroom in order for meaningful learning to take place.

Bilingual education does not promote separatism or cultural and linguistic isolation as some detractors argue. On the contrary, students and their families repeatedly tell us that proficiency of English language skills is an absolute necessity.

We must shift the emphasis and energy to the quality of bilingual education instead of hammering on its defense. Bilingualism makes sense socially, it make sense educationally and it makes

sense economically. For too long it has been presented as a deficit, a give and take model that would transition students who are limited in English away from their cultural resource.

We need to promote bilingualism as an asset-driven instructional approach. Its merit is not only important for students who need it, but for all students who attend our schools. Bilingual education exposes students to the rich diversity of people in Chicago, and promotes the maintenance of democratic principles.

May we promote unity in this country by recognizing linguistic and cultural diversity as an asset to be shared in our public institutions!

Sincerely,

Carlos Azcoitia

Director, School and Community Relations, Chicago Public Schools, Member, State Advisory Council on Bilingual Education

Comments expressed in the *Letters to the Editor* section, do not necessarily reflect the opinions and beliefs of the Illinois Association for Multilingual Multicultural Education (IAMME).

IAMME Membership Meeting Update

The IAMME Executive Board has met three times since the last issue, March 8, April 26, and May 17. In these meetings many changes for the upcoming year were discussed.

Membership Status and Projects

The IAMME membership has grown considerably and currently there are 671 members (as of 5/24/96). IAMME has in the past and is currently working to increase the membership through many different ways. In March IAMME participated in a fax blitz where approximately 233 faxes were sent out to area program directors to not only promote membership but to also promote the Spring Event with Virginia Collier. IAMME is also preparing to mail to universities and libraries in an effort to increase IAMME's institutional membership. Please see the IAMME application for a description of institutional benefits.

IAMME and NABE Elections

The IAMME board nominations were finalized and the election results were tallied at the May 17 meeting. A parent representative was not nominated for the board; therefore the new board will need to appoint one in the future. Any possible suggestions of a parent representative would be greatly appreciated.

Joe Negrón, IAMME past president, decided to run for the NABE board hoping that once again Illinois could be represented at a national level. Elections for the NABE board concluded on May 22; however, the results were not available at press time.

Membership Dues Increase

With the rising costs in printing the *IAMME Bulletin*, the *IAMME Journal*, as well as sponsoring special events, IAMME voted to raise membership dues by \$5.00. The increase will take effect June 30, 1996.

IAMME, however, will allow a grace period for expiring members until August 1, 1996. Any member whose membership expires before the end of this year may renew early if they want to pay at the old rate of \$15. Any renewals not paid by August 1 will be affected by the dues increase as well as any new member joining after July 1, 1996.

IAMME and the Internet

Maria Cristina Marchica has developed IAMME's first home page. The IAMME home page has one link, so far, and that is to the Bilingual/ESL Network (BEN). The web address is <http://tism.bevc.blacksburg.va.us/il/iamme.html>.

Mailing List Disclaimer

After much debate the motion was made and approved to place a mailing list disclaimer on the IAMME membership forms. This disclaimer, in the form of a check box, will give IAMME members a choice of whether or not to be included on any IAMME mailing list that is sold to outside parties.

Employment Opportunities

Waukegan Community Unit School District No. 60

1201 North Sheridan Road, Waukegan, IL 60085

Illinois suburban school district is seeking a ***Director of Language Minority Programs*** for the 1996 - 97 school year.

Current Administrative leadership in staff and program development as well as bilingual teaching experience preferred.

A Type 75 certificate is required for this 12 month position (July 1 - June 30) with a salary range of \$65,000 - \$69,000. District 60 serves 13,500 students, 20 percent served by the Spanish TBE program and less than 1 percent served by the TPI program.

Starting date is negotiable, but no later than September 2, 1996.

Apply before July 15, 1996 to: Dr. Peter Alvino, Associate Superintendent for Staff Personnel, Waukegan Public Schools, 1201 N. Sheridan Road, Waukegan, Illinois 60085-3099, (847) 360-5404.

Equal Opportunity Employer.

Wheeling School District No. 21

999 West Dundee Road, Wheeling, Illinois 60090

Bilingual Vacancies (Spanish)
1996 - 97

Full-time

Grades 1, multi-age 1-2, multi-age 3-4-5 & 7

Part-time

Kindergarten, Science

If you wish to receive an application, please submit a cover letter and resume to: Dr. Jeanne Mattick, Director of Personnel, School District 21, 999 W. Dundee Road, Wheeling, Illinois 60090. Our FAX number is (847) 520-2710.

Public School Vacancies can be found on the Internet!
Check out this site! <http://www.isbe.state.il.us>

Educational Feature: Joyce Kilmer School, Buffalo Grove

Embracing Bilingual Classes in New Environments

It is always difficult for a child to enter a new school. We know the nervousness and anticipation that they feel. But what about when a teacher begins a new school with a program that almost everyone else has never been to? This was the situation when I found out my bilingual first grade class would now be moved to a different building within District 21.

I must say that I could not have asked for a better situation to walk into than when I began the 1995-1996 school year. There were many positive aspects awaiting me and my future students.

The first aspect was our principal, Kim Zinman. She was the Bilingual/ESL Coordinator for Wheeling School District 21 for ten years. Kim's past experiences and knowledge were shared with all of the Kilmer staff before we ever even arrived. This facilitated the easy transition for the new first and second grade bilingual classes. The "teams" that had already been established by the first and second grade teachers were now welcoming two new bilingual members with open arms.

The second aspect, for me, was becoming an integral part of the Kindergarten-First grade team. When I found out about moving to Kilmer last May, Kim put me into contact with members of the K-1 team who informed me about meetings during the summer to further develop the integrated curriculum they had already begun. Their warming acceptance energized me for what was to come.

Planning and exploring with a group of colleagues that were so enthusiastic gave me a bright new perspective on teaching. This was true teamwork at its best, making curriculum work for monolingual classes of kindergarten and first grade, multi-age K-1 classes, and bilingual first grade and bilingual special education. Together we developed a two year integrated curriculum that rotated themes by the quarter.

Success has shone through with my students throughout the year. The bilingual students were actively involved in all the same activities as the monolingual students have been. The integration of classes during "Specials" and the lunch hour were not the only time the bilingual children were exposed to the other children. For example, we teamed our kids up during math games, theme days, and a variety of Lifeskill activities.

A third positive aspect is that Kilmer School has adapted Susan Kovalik's Lifelong Guidelines and Lifeskills that create an enduring atmosphere throughout the school. The students of all grades on a daily basis are exposed to vocabulary like responsibility, integrity, flexibility, cooperation, and initiative. These are just a few of the lifeskills that each teacher has adapted to their own curriculum instead of having "classroom rules". In weekly newsletters to parents, Kim touches on one or more of the Lifeskills, so these are carried out at home as well. At the beginning of the school year, the primary grades were introduced to all the Lifeskills through concrete activities that exemplified each one's true meaning.

Joyce Kilmer School has embraced the bilingual program as a whole in so many more ways. They enthusiastically welcomed us from the beginning and continued to provide that warm feeling the whole year through. If bilingual students are not able to attend classes in their home school there is much that the receiving school can do to help the newcomers (students and parents, alike) feel a part of their school. By treating the children as their own, Kilmer School has created a school environment that allows children to focus on learning, because their basic needs of belonging are being met.

By Cindi Tivin, Bilingual First Grade Teacher, Joyce Kilmer School, Buffalo Grove, Illinois

Spring Event Success

The IAMME Spring Event featuring Virginia Collier was a huge success. The Spring Event, which took place April 11, 1996, was attended by over 180 people. Ms. Collier spoke and answered numerous questions from the attentive crowd for over 2 hours. A wine and cheese reception followed the event.

Virginia Collier discussed the implications of her longitudinal research examining the academic achievement of 42,000 students. Collier asserted that the standardized test scores of students who participated in English-immersion programs begin to decrease markedly (to below the 20th percentile) especially by the middle grades. Meanwhile, students who have received native language instruction, or are in a dual language program for a period of five to seven years, score as well or better than their native English speaking peers. For additional information,

the New Jersey TESOL-BE chapter has published Virginia Collier's 1995 monograph *Promoting Academic Success for ESL Students: Understanding Second Language Acquisition for School*. Their phone number is 1-800-95-EBESL.

IAMME would like to thank the Illinois Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (IASCD) for their co-sponsorship of this event. IAMME would also like to extend their greatest appreciation to the Illinois Resource Center who not only helped co-sponsor the event but also helped with the pre-registration of 102 people.

IAMME would also like to thank all of the members that volunteered their time to help out at the Spring Event. IAMME hopes that even more members will be involved in future events.

Connecting Immigrant Parents and Schools

Immigrant parents continue as a largely untapped resource in their children's schooling, despite overwhelming evidence that parent participation can lead to a significant improvement in student achievement, more positive attitudes toward school, and stronger parent/teacher relationships.

Among the factors responsible for limited participation in school activities by immigrant parents are: language barriers, cultural conflicts, lack of transportation, long working hours, and limited knowledge of the U.S. public education system.

Many efforts to involve parents in their children's schooling fail because they lack a comprehensive approach, a strong commitment from school officials, and proper planning and implementation. Education research and practical experience suggest a variety of strategies to build and maintain effective partnerships between immigrant parents and schools.

Identify and Address Needs

- **Provide native-language orientation** to inform immigrant parents about the U.S. school system, the legal rights of students, education services and programs offered by the school, extracurricular activities, and student evaluation and assessment procedures.
- **Identify needs, concerns, and expectations** of immigrant parents through dialogue between parents, teachers, and

support service personnel using phone calls, home visits, parent/teacher conferences, and informal surveys. Use bilingual/bicultural school staff to facilitate this process.

- **Place a priority on responding to parents' needs** by designating a committee to take on this endeavor. This committee could be part of an existing organization such as a parent council, a home/school council, or the PTA.
- **Develop parent support networks** using trained parents and community members to promote parent-to-parent communication.

Develop Effective Partnerships

- **Put policies in writing** to legitimize the importance of parent involvement and help frame the context for program activities by explicitly spelling out to all participants what they are empowered to do.
- **Provide strong administrative support** with adequate funding and support resources such as meeting places and computers, and designation of school personnel to help carry out the program.
- **Stress a partnership approach** with an emphasis on joint planning, goal setting, definition of roles, program assessment development of instructional efforts, and setting of school standards.
- **Promote two-way communication** requiring frequent contacts between school and home to allow parents to feel comfortable coming to school to voice concerns and share ideas. School staff should welcome parent input and use it to fashion relevant learning activities.
- **Evaluate parent involvement programs** at key stages, as well as at the conclusion of a cycle or phase, to make program revisions on a continuous basis.

Promote Collaboration

- **Provide the necessary training** to parents and school staff on partnering skills to ensure that parents are able to participate actively in all aspects of school life. Training must address language barriers and cultural differences between parents and school staff. Use community resources to assist with this training.
- **Develop numerous, nonthreatening participatory opportunities** for parents, such as becoming paid or volunteer teacher aides, visiting classrooms, attending discussion sessions on education issues, organizing multicultural and other school events, and having an active role in school governance and decision making. Numerous and varied activities offer multiple entry points for parents with differing interests, time constraints, skills, and confidence levels.
- **Facilitate parent participation** in school events by distributing all written materials in the parents' home language and by providing child care and transportation.

Source:

Mobilization For Equity, March, 1996. Reprinted with permission.



IAMME Gets Caught In The Web

IAMME Does the Internet!

We are proud to present IAMME's homepage address on the internet:

<http://tism.bevc.blacksburg.va.us/il/iamme.html>

Take the plunge! "Surf" to our new site and add it to your bookmarks! This webpage was designed to help keep you informed about your professional organization. You will be able to find information regarding IAMME's history, purpose, objectives, and even guidelines for membership.

Upcoming events sponsored by IAMME will also be available for preview with a simple click of a button.

Please feel free to print out any information from the IAMME webpages for your own purposes as well as for your colleagues. The membership form,

as well as a sign-up form for the IAMME events can simply be downloaded to your printer. You can then fill out the information and mail or fax it on its way. In the future however, we hope to offer direct IAMME membership renewal and event sign-ups right over the wires! Until then... Happy Surfing!

The Quarterly Internet Pick and Tip:

A tip for those techies who want more...right from the IAMME homepage there is a link to the fast-growing Bilingual ESL Network, otherwise known as BEN. Even if you are new to the internet, check out the BEN site after visiting the IAMME page to find just about any resource you might ever need relating to Bilingual Education and/or ESL. The BEN web address is:

<http://tism/bevc.blacksburg.va.us/ben.html>



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Usually two or more grades are taught under one teacher or team of teachers (Gaustad, 1992; Katz, Evangelou and Hartman, 1990; Pavan, 1992).

Mixed-age grouping is a philosophy, based on the belief that students will derive significant cognitive and socio-emotional benefits from this kind of classroom arrangement (Bozzone, 1995; McClellan, 1994; Theilheimer, 1993). It cannot be based on administrative convenience due to overcrowding or small enrollment in one or more particular grade levels (Lodish, 1992).

In this setting students are expected to progress along a curricular continuum at their individual and frequently differing rates, learning content and skills that are increasingly complex (Bozzone, Gaustad, 1992; Grant & Johnson, 1995; Gutierrez and Slavin, 1992).

Multi-age groups appear to be particularly adequate for the preschool and early primary levels, where young children of the same chronological age can actually be at significantly different developmental moments and therefore not able to learn at a homogeneous pace (Cushman, 1990; Katz et al, 1990; McClellan 1994; Theilheimer, 1993). This paper will attempt to discuss the pertinency of this method for students belonging to language minority groups.

***“Research with multi-age groups suggest
.....students tend to exhibit greater
independence and dependability, more self-
confidence and strengthened self-esteem,
more self-regulatory behavior as well as
more positive attitudes towards school”***

The heterogeneous composition of multi-age groups resembles neighborhoods and families and therefore can offer students the opportunity to learn from more experienced peers. Mixed-age groups also provide multiple opportunities for accommodating different learning styles and developmental stages (Katz et al, 1990; McClellan, 1994; Theilheimer, 1993; Gaustad, 1992; Grant & Johnson, 1995; Lodish, 1992). Older, more experienced students support younger ones with emerging abilities and knowledge, making it increasingly possible for children to learn from each other (Cushman, 1990).

Advantages of Mixed-Age Groups for Teachers and Students

Katz, Evangelou and Hartman (1993) assert:

“The greater diversity of maturity and competence present in a mixed-age group, compared to that in the same age group, provides a sufficient number of models to allow most participants to identify models from whom they can learn – some of whom will be of the same age, of course.”(p .2).

Theorists like Piaget (1954) and to a greater extent Vygotsky have explained cognitive development in ways that support multi-age education (McClellan, 1994). Piaget affirmed that active interaction with peers was central to children’s cognitive development as it offered them opportunities to understand their own intellectual processes and that of others. He sustained that

peers of different ages could expand and enrich the possibilities of intellectual conflict, thus enhancing cognitive growth.

Vygotsky also believed that the richest educational experiences for children were those that occurred in the framework of collaboration with more knowledgeable partners, because these partnerships allowed children to function within what he called the “zone of proximal development.” This concept refers to the level of knowledge or skill that children can exhibit with the prompting and help of adults or older, more experienced peers, but cannot perform on their own. The “expert” partner offers an intellectual scaffold that allows the “novice” to accomplish tasks not yet possible without outside help (Katz et al, 1990; McClellan, 1994).

Rogoff (1990) compares the process of acquiring the skills and dexterities valued within any particular community to an apprenticeship that is reinforced and encouraged by the members of the community itself, and the values they uphold. In the mixed-age classroom, the concept of apprenticeship can be particularly pertinent, emphasizing the importance of acquiring knowledge in settings where different degrees of ability are present.

The conflict generated by different levels of cognitive functioning within the same classroom environment can lead to a reorganization of knowledge and encourage flexible and dynamic approaches to learning and problem solving (Katz, 1990; McClellan, 1994). Similarly, different measures of ability in a classroom become non-threatening to children who might be functioning below average in some area of development while providing the less experienced members of a multi-age group the chance of academic eavesdropping (Bozzone, 1995; Cushman, 1990).

Research with multi-age groups suggests that students develop stronger social ability, interactive skills and prosocial behaviors (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Gaustad, 1992; Gayfer, 1991; Katz et al, 1990; Theilheimer, 1993). These students tend to exhibit greater independence and dependability, more self-confidence and strengthened self-esteem, more self-regulatory behavior as well as more positive attitudes towards school (Grant & Johnson, 1995). Multiyear placement also encourages trust, bonding and a sense of belonging. It enables older children to accept responsibility as role models to develop a willingness to help the young (McClellan, 1994). By allowing students to experience being the older and younger members of a class at a given time, mixed-age grouping permits children to fulfill different roles and respond to a variety of expectations that will enrich their perception of themselves as members of a community (Katz et al, 1990).

In the very young, the presence of playmates of different ages encourages socially complex play situations and a richer verbal behavior where patterns of speech are adjusted to the age of the listener (Cushman, 1990; Katz et al, 1990; McClellan, 1994).

Teachers find that mixed age groups provide them the opportunity of seeing their students’ learning and development unfold through a period of two or more years. This method also allows time and occasion to develop a better relationship with families that can lead to greater parental participation in the

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school life of their children (Bozzone, 1995; Calkins, 1992; Gayfer, 1991; La Rosa & Moon, 1995; Theilheimer, 1993).

Children in multi-age classrooms spend at least two years with the same teacher or team of teachers, allowing close to half the class to be familiarized with the daily routine and teacher's style. This can significantly reduce the period of initial adjustment and allow more time for content teaching and learning. The teacher knows many of the students at the beginning of the year, a contingency that can help instruction become more efficient and effective (Gayfer, 1991; Grant & Johnson, 1995; Lodish, 1992; Theilheimer, 1993).

Multi-age classrooms usually function under a curriculum that targets a continuum of cognitive development and skills that children acquire at their own pace (Bozzone, 1995; Gaustad, 1992; La Rosa & Moon, 1995).

Peer tutoring can be implemented in the framework where it has proven to be most effective: between children of different ages and developmental levels (Cushman, 1992; Gaustad, 1992). Younger children will then have the opportunity of previewing what they will be able to do as they mature. More advanced members of the group could reinforce a newly learned skill by teaching it to somebody else (Lodish, 1992). Groups can be heterogeneous and flexible, changing with the development and growth that different children experience and taking the focus away from same-age competition.

Advantages for Language Minority Students

Research on language minority students often suggests that they are at a greater risk of experiencing school failure (Bowman, 1990; Garcia, n.d.). The reasons are varied and complex, and include the fact that language minority children are more likely to live in poverty and suffer the effects of prejudice and discrimination within the educational system (Bowman, 1990).

There is also a significant difference between the values upheld at home and the school culture in this population which may, in part, explain lower academic performance (Bowman, 1990, 1992; Garcia, n.d.; Ogbu, 1991).

Goodlad and Anderson (1987) argue against fitting children within a chronological age span in the same grade level, asserting that individual levels of achievement differ greatly from child to child. This can be particularly true of students belonging to a cultural and linguistic minority, who might have had limited access to the mainstream learning agenda.

Schools as social institutions possess a highly specialized set of codes and values that usually reflect those of the mainstream culture (Bowman, 1992; Garcia, n.d.). If we consider that academic learning is more likely to occur in contexts that are socio-culturally meaningful to the student, incongruity or mismatch between the codes and values of the school and those transmitted by the home can seriously hinder the learning process (Bowman, 1992; Garcia, n.d.; Ogbu, 1991). Usually the expectations held by school systems about how students should approach problem solving tasks are clearly defined. These norms may be puzzling to children from a culture that differs from the mainstream school culture, leading children not familiar with these expectations to approach problem solving in ways that

might be interpreted as unsuccessful by school standards (Rogoff & Morelli, 1989).

Another factor of poor school performance in language minority children is the lack of experiences related to early numeracy and literacy (Zill, Collins, West & Hausken, 1995). Children living in homes where English is not the primary language are less likely to be exposed to experiences that have a direct connection to the kind of learning that schools promote (Bowman, 1992).

Multi-age groups can address these disparities by allowing older, more experienced students to bridge the gap between home and school culture for less experienced students. Since the school agenda frequently requires students to perform tasks and learn skills that do not have an immediate practical significance to them, individuals with more school experience are more adept to respond to this requirement, and therefore serve as models for their more inexperienced counterparts (Rogoff & Morelli, 1989).

School also implies the adequate interpretation of non-explicit expectation and codes, that nevertheless have as strong an impact upon school success as the more explicit ones (Bowman, 1992; Garcia, n.d.; McClellan, 1994). Children who have had a longer scholasticity can help younger peers decode many of the demands embedded in the school agenda. The availability of role models who are responding adequately to the non-academic school curriculum can facilitate this sometime uneasy transition between home and school, especially for minority students.

Given the wider range of development and abilities found in multi-age groups, children functioning below average in some areas will feel less threatened or inadequate (Bozzone, 1995; Cushman, 1990; Lodish, 1992). On the contrary, the presence of higher functioning students can also serve as a preview of what they could achieve at a later moment, allowing for authentic cognitive scaffolding to occur (Grant & Johnson, 1995).

For the above stated reasons, multigrade classrooms are usually less competitive than traditional ones, precisely because they gather children at very different moments of the developmental continuum. Therefore, they can become exciting, but safe places that convey a sense of acceptance offering rich opportunities for growth and learning (Theilheimer, 1993). Nothing can be more fitting to the needs of language minority children, whose self-image can be menaced by a wide range of external social factors (Bowman, 1990).

Research suggests that multi-age classrooms are more likely to use a wider variety of teaching strategies and methods (Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Grant & Johnson, 1995; Goodlad & Anderson, 1987). This practice can facilitate children of diverse backgrounds finding a place for themselves in the classroom, and being exposed to interactive/experiential methods more conducive to an empowering and effective education (Cummins, 1989; Garcia, n.d.).

Students with a better proficiency in the English language can support and motivate second language acquisition in others with less English, particularly under the premise that a positive valorization and actual use of L2 among peers and role models leads to a more flexible and functional bilingualism (Hakuta, 1986). The intellectual maturity of older learners, which implies

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Six (6) copies of the dissertation abstract, prepared as directed in the guidelines, must be received by September 6, 1996. Send them to the competition chair at the above address.

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broader knowledge about how speech works, can contribute to a more complex approach to learning a second language. This can also positively impact younger students trying to learn English making available for them a broader variety of linguistic patterns (Hakuta, 1986).

Summary

Language minority students are often considered to be “at risk” of academic failure, for reasons that range from poverty and discrimination to little exposure to experiences that favor academic success (Bowman, 1990; Cummins, 1989; Zill, et al, 1995). Retention is one of the most used strategies to deal with poor academic performance, and often one of the most ineffective (Slavin & Madden, 1989).

Having students in a non-graded or multi-age group can be one alternative to grade retention and pull-out intervention programs whose main purpose is to allow students to match the academic performance of their peers. Multi-age education permits children to progress at their own rate while having access to more advanced students who serve both as supporters and models of academic excellence.

The extended time spent with the same teacher and group of peers can also translate in less negative pressure for those experiencing academic difficulties. Knowing that there is time to master skills and concepts can relieve some of the urgency and

reduce the negative impact upon the students’ self-esteem. The availability of more experienced peers who might have also struggled and triumphed can be at the same time reassuring and motivating.

The configuration of the mixed-age classroom itself can facilitate the implementation of “remedial” strategies in subjects as vital as reading. Group assignments and peer tutoring can serve as a viable way of targeting reading difficulties accentuated by linguistic and cultural differences (Sutton, 1989).

This in no way implies that mixed-age groups are to become a panacea for every problem faced by language minority students. The implementation of such learning environments demand considerable investment, particularly in teacher training, if these classrooms are not to become places where two or more parallel curricula are being taught.

Multi-age classrooms appear to be particularly appropriate for the learning styles and developmental needs of preschool and early primary children, where developmental milestones are many and readiness to learn skills and concepts occur within a very flexible agenda (Cushman, 1990; Katz et al, 1990).

Because multi-age classrooms can pose numerous demands on teachers’ time and challenge their preconceived notions about teaching and learning, it is highly recommended that teachers have available extensive administrative and collegial support

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(NEA, 1995). Teachers engaged in this endeavor report that doing so with a partner greatly increased the success of their enterprise while considerably diminishing feelings of isolation and frustration.

Multi-age classrooms can then be considered as an exciting and effective alternative to teaching language minority students, particularly in the preschool and early primary years. The advantages of supporting children's development in a relaxed, non-threatening environment are many and particularly relevant to the strengthening of children's self-esteem and feeling of belonging. The pertinency of these issues in the education of bilingual students has been widely documented and supported by a large body of available research (Bowman, 1990, 1992; Cummins, 1989; Garcia, n.d.).

Divergent school and home cultures have been negatively linked to school performance, underscoring the need to find effective ways of bridging these differences among language minority students. Multigraded classrooms can ease this transition between differing home and school cultures, providing younger more inexperienced students with models that symbolize successful patterns of response and adaptation to the explicit and implicit school demands.

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Resources for Bilingual Educators

Issues in Cross-Cultural Assessment. American Indian and Alaska Native Students, published by the Far West Laboratory. This issue briefly explores issues that have affected the lack of fair and valid assessment of Native American students. Some of these issues include culturally unfamiliar material on tests; the timed nature of many tests which fail to provide the extra time students need to process a language which may be unfamiliar to them; and over reliance on verbal communication as opposed to more culturally familiar non-verbal communication. The brief continues by identifying assessment practices that conform to the cultural and linguistic realities of Native American students' lives. \$3; Far West Laboratory, (415) 565-3044.

Many Faces of Mexico, by Octavio Ruiz, Amy Sanders, and Meredith Sommers. This is a 24-lesson curriculum from the Resource Center of the Americas. Divided into five units, the 352-page book leads teachers and students on a participatory journey through Mexican history, from pre-conquest indigenous societies to the colonial era, war with the US, the 1910-1930 revolution and recent developments such as the Chiapas revolt. The examination of Mexican history stresses seven key themes: access and control of land and other resources; changing borders and boundaries; human migration; basic economic needs; social organization and political participation; popular culture and belief systems; and diversity of perspectives. \$49.95 plus \$5 shipping and handling. A Spanish supplement will be available in February 1996 for an additional \$25. Resource Center of the Americas, 317 Seventeenth Ave. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414, (612) 627-9445 or Fax (612) 627-9450.

Multicultural Education, published by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Publications include a checklist, an annotated bibliography, and a booklet on promising programs, The "How Multicultural is Your School?" checklist allows schools to quickly determine areas in which multiculturalism can be increased in the school environment. The annotated bibliography covers research-based information on multicultural education. It covers the areas of school policies and practices; curriculum, instruction and assessment; high expectations and opportunities to reach them; knowledge about a variety of cultures and languages; learning environments; and professional development. The third booklet presents a selective listing of promising programs and practices, providing examples of professional development programs, school-based initiatives, and other efforts to implement culturally responsive education. Bibliography: \$5.95 (UMS-ABM-94); Promising Practices: \$6.95 (UMS-PPP-95). NCREL, 1900 Spring Road, Suite 300, Oak Brook, IL 60521-1480, (847) 571-4700 or Fax(847) 571 4716.

Native Literacy and Language Roundtable Proceedings, published by the National Center on Adult Literacy. Report on a three-day conference on native languages, including the history of Indian education, lack of funding, inappropriate programs of the past and negative policies engendered by these programs. The proceedings also highlight successful practices and positive alternatives around the country. It contains a summary of the presentations and discussions and concludes with a list of recommendations for action in the areas of curriculum development, teacher preparation, collaboration, advocacy, policy development, funding and technology. \$7 prepaid (order no- PR94-03). The National Center on Adult Literacy, 3910 Chestnut Street, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104-3111.

Profile of Effective Teaching in a Multilingual Classroom, produced by the National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning (NCRCDLL). The fourth video in the series *Meeting the Challenge of Teaching Linguistically Diverse Students*, this video showcases middle school teacher Robin Liten-Tejada and the linguistically and culturally diverse students in her High Intensity Language Training (HILT) class. Ms. Liten-Tejada explains the effective strategies she employs in math, social studies and language arts classes to develop her students' language skills, content knowledge and learning strategies. The accompanying guide provides trainers with background information and suggestions for using the video in a wide variety of formats. \$40.00 plus 10% shipping and handling. NCRCDLL, 1118 22nd Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20037, (202) 429-9292.

Quantifying Language: A Researcher's and Teacher's Guide to Gathering Language Data and Reducing it to Figures, by Phil Scholfield. This book offers the would-be language researcher an overview of ways of gathering, and turning into figures, data from a wide variety of subdisciplines of linguistics, with numerous examples and onward reading references. The book places "language testing" within the wider context of language measurement in general, and draws attention to some ways of measuring language that have been more associated with research, but which are coming to be used for pedagogical assessment as well. \$29.95 (# 1853592536). Multilingual Matters, c/o Taylor & Francis, 1900 Frost Road, Suite 101, Bristol, PA 19007-1598, (800) 821-8312 or Fax (215) 785-5515.

Resources are listed for the information of the IAMME membership. A listing does not imply an endorsement of the resource by the Illinois Association for Multilingual Multicultural Education. If you want more information about any item listed in this column, you must contact the publisher/developer directly.

This column was reprinted from the NABE News.

ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION FOR MULTILINGUAL MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The Illinois Association for Multilingual Multicultural Education (IAMME) is pleased to announce that we offer Illinois educators a combined membership with our national organization, the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE). Regular membership for NABE is \$48.00. Regular membership in IAMME is \$20.00. A combined membership is \$60.00 which represents a savings of \$8.00. Individual memberships in IAMME are, of course, still available. Now you have even more reason to join us!

IAMME is a professional association for people who promote high quality educational policies and practices for potentially English proficient learners. It is an organization comprised of people who believe in the benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Historical Background: Originally, the Illinois Association for Bilingual Education (IABE) was a pioneer affiliate of NABE. It was founded in the early 70's in response to the need for promoting educational services for potentially English proficient (PEP) students in the State of Illinois. In 1988, in an effort to include all educators involved with linguistically and culturally diverse students, the name was changed to the Illinois Association for Multilingual Multicultural Education (IAMME).

Purpose: The twin purposes of **IAMME** are:

- The promotion of meaningful, effective, and efficient education for linguistically and culturally diverse students which includes the development of multilingualism and multiculturalism.
- The promotion of quality educational practices for developing an appreciation for cultural and linguistic diversity in a global society.

Objectives:

- 1.) To promote and develop professional competence and standards in educational services for linguistically and culturally diverse students in cooperation with teacher training institutions; national, state, and local educational agencies; and professional as well as community organizations,
- 2.) To hold seminars and conferences for the promotion, development, and enhancement of meaningful, effective, and efficient educational services for linguistically and culturally diverse students in Illinois with an emphasis on multilingualism and multiculturalism.
- 3.) To disseminate information, materials, and data useful in the attainment of these objectives.
- 4.) To serve as a source of information and employment opportunities for members.
- 5.) To serve as advocates for the schooling of all linguistically and culturally diverse students,
- 6.) To encourage and facilitate the active involvement of parents and communities in issues concerning the education of linguistically and culturally diverse students in Illinois.

Membership Eligibility: All professional or paraprofessional educators, parents, students or community members interested in the purposes and objectives of **IAMME** or the promotion of multilingual, multicultural education.

Membership Benefits: Your membership entitles you to the following benefits:

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- Reduced fees at annual conference events*
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- Participation in all **IAMME** activities
- Acquisition of professional materials and relevant services
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WHAT TO DO: Fill out the form on the reverse side and mail it together with a check payable to **IAMME** to:

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* Institutional members excluded: in replace of discounts for conference events, institutional members may receive multiple copies of IAMME publications when requested.

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